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[In March 2016, I presented two papers to a group of influential Adventist administrative and lay leaders. These papers, until now, have not been released. But, given the current discussion in Silver Spring, the time has come. The most pertinent of the papers is "The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities." Although written months before the recent paper by the General Conference, it addresses many of the same issues from a very different perspective. The other paper (actually the first in my presentation series) sets the stage for the one on Unions. It's title is "The Antiorganizational People Organize in Spite of Themselves."]

The Antiorganizational People Organize
in Spite of Themselves[1]

Antiorganizational in the extreme is the only proper description for those independent Bible students who would form the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1860s, nearly 20 years after the end of Millerism. Their antipathy towards organized churches finds its roots in the period before the 1844 Disappointment.

An Anti-organizational Heritage

Pre-disappointment attitudes toward organization follow two lines. The first is the organizational position of the Christian Connexion to which two (James White and Joseph Bates) of the three founders of Seventh-day Adventism belonged. According to an 1836 history, the movement arose in several parts of the United States in the early 1800's "not so much to establish any peculiar and distinctive doctrines, as *to assert, for individuals and churches, more liberty and independence* in relation to matters of faith and practice, to *shake off the authority* of human creeds and the shackles of prescribed modes and forms, to make the Bible their only guide, claiming for every man the right to be his own expositor of it, to judge, for himself, what are its doctrines and requirements, and in practice, to follow more strictly the simplicity of the apostles and primitive Christians." The movement *opposed any "infringement of Christian*

liberty," in terms of both creedal statements and structural governance.[2]

In spite of their radical independence, the Connexionists did grant the need for structure at the local church level, but they considered "each church" or congregation "an independent body, possessing exclusive authority to regulate and govern their own affairs."[3] The movement was held together by periodicals and periodic meetings or conferences.

The second line of development in Adventism's anti-organizational stance is the Millerite experience. Unlike the Connexionists, most Millerite Adventists were not anti-organizational in their attitudes during the early years of their movement. On the other hand, they had no desire to form their own organization. To the contrary, they sought to remain in the various denominations while they witnessed to their Advent faith and waited for Christ's coming. Time was too short for any new organization.

The fact that the Millerites did not have a separate denominational organization did not mean that they lacked structure. Joshua V. Himes had welded them into an impressive missionary movement that reflected his Connexionist background. As a result, we find periodicals and regular general conference meetings at the heart of the forward drive of Millerism. Those two elements formed the "structure" of the Millerite Adventist movement.

That "structure" formed one aspect of Hitlerism's contribution to early Sabbatarian Adventism's attitude toward church organization. The second aspect had to do with the conflict between Millerism and the denominations. It was one thing to agitate for the Advent message from within the denominations when the event was a few years off. But it was quite another thing as the year of the end approached. Increasing conflict arose as Millerite ministers lost their pulpits and Miller's followers were excluded from fellowship.

It is in that context that Charles Fitch in July 1843 published what became one of the most influential Millerite sermons. Based on Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-5, it was titled "'Come Out of Her My People.'" In essence, those apocalyptic passages deal with both the fall of

Babylon and the consequent need of God's people to flee from the corrupt system it represented. Babylon for Fitch included all those who rejected the message of Christ's soon coming.[4]

One Millerite preacher who felt especially impressed to proclaim the message to leave other churches was George Storrs. Storrs wrote that Babylon "is the *old mother* and all her children [the Protestant denominations]; who are known by the family likeness, a domineering, lordly spirit; a spirit to suppress a free search after truth, and a free expression of our conviction of what is truth."[5]

Individuals needed to abandon the denominations because "we have no right to let any men, or body of men, thus lord it over us. And to remain in such an organized body . . . is to remain in Babylon." To Storrs the history of organized religion (both Catholic and Protestant) was one of bigotry and persecution. He argued against visible, organized churches and opted for God's great invisible church that "the Lord organizes" on the basis of the "bonds of love." In the face of persecution caused by a sincere belief in the soon coming of Jesus, Storrs concluded that "no church can be organized by man's invention but what it becomes Babylon *the moment it is organized*."[6]

One Millerite family that experienced the persecuting force of the denominations was that of young Ellen Harmon, which was disfellowshipped from the Methodist Episcopal Church of Portland, Maine, in September 1843.[7] Through that experience Ellen had witnessed firsthand the unjustness of a highly centralized denomination that in the state of Maine had systematically purged both laypeople and ministers who would not renounce their Millerite beliefs.

While not all Millerites accepted Storrs' extreme conclusions, his message, along with the believers' painful experiences at the hands of organized churches, left an indelible impression on the great bulk of the believers. It was so strong that all Millerite groups found it next to impossible to organize to any significant extent after the Great Disappointment of October 23, 1844.

Early Sabbatarian Adventist Moves
toward Organization, 1844-1854

As noted above, all three of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism had reasons to fear organized religion. Beyond that, they also belonged to that sector of post-disappointment Adventism that believed that the door of probation had closed and that their mission to the world at large had been completed in 1844. Because of that belief they felt no desire to organize for reasons of evangelism or mission.

The first stimulus to change was the felt need to share the theological insights they had gained between 1845 and 1847 with other shut door Adventists. At this early date, however, they felt no need to share their understanding of the Bible with the larger world since they had not yet worked through their erroneous idea that probation had already closed.

They viewed their rather limited mission to ex-Millerites in terms of what they labeled the scattering and gathering times. The scattering time had begun in late October 1844 with the splintering of the Millerite movement. But by 1848 the Whites and Bates were absolutely convinced that they had the answer for the scattered believers. James White put it nicely in November 1849: "The scattering time we have had; it is in the past, and now the time for the saints to be gathered into the unity of the faith, and be sealed by one holy, uniting truth *has come*. Yes, Brother, *it has come*."[8]

Sabbatarian outreach during the gathering time took two forms. One consisted of periodic conferences to help bring about unity of belief. The first of the Sabbatarian conferences convened in the spring of 1848. The main purposes of the conferences was evangelistic, to unite a body of believers on the three angels' messages.[9]

The second avenue that the Sabbatarian leadership used to gather in a people involved the development of various periodicals. At the Sabbatarian conference held in Dorchester, Massachusetts, during November 1848, Ellen White had a vision with special implications for

her husband. After coming out of it, she told him that he "must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people." It would be small at first, but eventually it would be "like streams of light that went clear round the world."[10] In response to that vision, James White would begin publishing *Present Truth* in July 1849, a periodical that evolved into *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* by November 1850.

We should note that the two methods that the Sabbatarians used to gather in a people were not only evangelistic but also provided *their first organizational format*. The 1850s would witness the continuation of periodic conferences as the various congregations of Sabbathkeeping Adventists sent members to represent them in general meetings of Sabbatarian believers.

The *Review and Herald* not only printed notices and resolutions of those meetings, but also provided the scattered Sabbatarians with news of their "church" and fellow believers, sermons, and a sense of belonging. Thus the *Review* was probably the most effective instrument in both gathering and uniting the body of believers.

Throughout the 1850s the Sabbatarian movement would consist of a loose association of congregations and individuals united through the agency of periodicals and "conferences," or general meetings, of believers. Thus, whether they realized it or not, *the Sabbatarians were operating with the same type of church order as that of the Connexionists and the Millerites*. But the continuation of time, the rapid growth in the number of Sabbatarians, and their expanding vision of mission would soon demand further organizational initiatives.

Another stimulus that drove the Sabbatarians toward developing a more extensive system of church organization derived from a need to maintain ethical and doctrinal unity. Problems related to those issues would arise soon after the beginning of the gathering time and would culminate in both of the Whites firmly appealing for "gospel order" in the latter part of 1853.

But even before that date the Whites had indicated the need for order to save the movement from such things as fanaticism and false preachers. Ellen White, for example, called

the Sabbatarian to move according to "Bible order" in 1850.[11]

The rapid growth of the Sabbatarian movement also necessitated some sort of order or structure. By 1852 there may have been as many as 2,000 Sabbatarian Adventists. While that growth was good, it brought with it new problems and challenges while aggravating some of the older problems already facing the young movement. Many new congregations of Sabbathkeepers had formed but no order existed among them even at the congregational level. That made them easy prey to fanatics and unauthorized preachers from both inside and outside their local group. Such a state of affairs in 1851 led the Whites to believe that the movement required their personal presence from time to time to modify and correct abuses. Thus the next few years would see their reports in the *Review* with such titles as "Our Tour East."

On those tours the Whites dealt with such issues as fanaticism, disfellowshipping, and the "importance of union." We also find in 1851 the first information we have on the appointment of local church officers.[12] That same year the *Review* also reported the first ordination in Adventist records. Washington Morse was apparently ordained to the gospel ministry.[13]

By 1852 the Sabbatarians had come to see themselves less as a "scattered flock" and more as a church. A reinterpretation of the shut door doctrine accompanied that recognition. They gradually concluded that probation for the world at large had not closed in 1844 and that they had a mission to those who had not been in the Millerite movement. Such realizations would add their weight in pressing the Sabbatarians toward a more substantial organization.

The major problem they faced in the early 1850s was that they had no systematic defense against impostors. Almost anybody who wanted to could preach in Sabbatarian congregations. Large sectors of Adventism had no checks on ministerial orthodoxy or even morality as it faced the crisis of a self-appointed ministry.

The year 1853 would see the Sabbatarians take two steps to protect their congregations from "false" brethren. First, the leading Sabbatarian ministers adopted a plan whereby approved

preachers received a card "recommending them to the fellowship of the Lord's people everywhere, simply stating that they were approved in the work of the gospel ministry." Two ministers known by Sabbatarian Adventists to be leaders of the movement dated and signed the cards.[14]

The second method utilized by the Sabbatarians to certify their leaders was ordination. By late 1853 they regularly ordained both traveling preachers (ministers assigned to specific congregations did not yet exist) and deacons (who appear to be the only local church officers at that early period).

But even those actions had not solved the problem. As a result, both James and Ellen White issued major calls for "gospel order" in December 1853. James led the assault for better organization with four articles in the *Review* entitled "Gospel Order." His December 6 article redefined Babylon in the Sabbatarian context. "It is a lamentable fact," he asserted, "that many of our Advent brethren who made a timely escape from the bondage of the different churches [Babylon] . . . have since *been in a more perfect Babylon than ever before. Gospel order has been too much overlooked by them. . . . Many in their zeal to come out of Babylon, partook of a rash, disorderly spirit, and were soon found in a perfect Babylon of confusion. . . . To suppose that the church of Christ is free from restraint and discipline, is the wildest fanaticism.*"[15]

Late December 1853 also saw Ellen White's first extensive call for further order. Basing her sentiments on a vision received during her and James's eastern tour in the fall of 1852, she wrote that "*the Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected. There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. And now in these last days*, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, *there is more real need of order than ever before.*" Most of her article dealt with the problems raised by the "self-sent messengers" who

were "a curse to the cause" of the Sabbatarians. As did James, she dealt with the qualifications of ministers and the ordination of those approved by "brethren of experience and of sound minds."[16]

James and Ellen White were quite settled by the beginning of 1854 on the need for more order and structure among the Sabbatarians. James not only considered it important, he also believed that the movement wouldn't see much growth without it.[17]

The fact that Sabbatarian Adventism also faced its first organized schisms at that time, beginning with the Messenger Party in 1854, undoubtedly reinforced James's convictions on the topic of gospel order. With that in mind, it is little wonder that the second half of the 1850s saw an increasing number of articles reflecting a developing understanding of Bible principles related to church order and the ordination of approved leaders.

Joseph Bates was quite convinced that biblical church order must be restored to the church before the Second Advent. He was also clear that it was the apostolic order of the church that needed to be restored. He made no room for any element of organization not found in the New Testament.[18] James White at this early period shared a similar opinion. Thus he could write in 1854 that "by gospel, or church order we mean that order in church association and discipline taught in the gospel of Jesus Christ by the writers of the New Testament."[19] A few months later he spoke of the "perfect system of order, set forth in the New Testament, by inspiration of God. . . . The Scriptures present a perfect system, which, if carried out, will save the Church from Imposters" and provide the ministers with an adequate platform for carrying out the work of the church.[20]

J. B. Frisbie, the most active writer in the *Review* in the mid-1850s on church order, *agreed with Bates and White that every aspect of church order needed to be explicitly spelled out in the Bible*. Thus he argued against any church name except the *one* given by God in the Bible, "THE CHURCH OF GOD." Any other name, "savors more of Babylon, . . . than it does" of God's

church. By the same logic, Frisbie implied in agreement with others, they should not keep church membership lists since the names of God's children are recorded in the books of heaven.[21]

With their literalistic biblical approach to church order it is of little surprise that Frisbie and others soon began to discuss the duty of a second local church officer—the elder. In January 1855 he noted that there were "two classes of preaching elders" in the New Testament churches—"traveling elders" and "local elders." The traveling elders had a supervisory role over several churches, whereas "local elders . . . had the pastoral care and oversight of one church." He went on to observe that local churches should have both elders and deacons. The first, he pointed out, "had the oversight of the spiritual, the other the temporal affairs of the church."[22] By the end of the year Sabbatarians were ordaining local elders as well as deacons and pastors.

Gradually they were strengthening gospel order at the level of the local church. In fact, the individual congregation was the only level of organization that most Sabbatarians gave much thought to. Thus such leaders as Bates could preface an extended article on "Church Order" with the following definition: "*CHURCH, signifies a particular congregation of believers* in Christ, united together in the order of the gospel."[23]

Moving Beyond Concerns with Local Church Organization, 1855-1859

In the second half of the 1850s the church-order debate among Sabbatarians would focus on what it meant for congregations to be "united together." At least four issues would force leaders such as James White to look at church organization more globally. The first had to do with the legal ownership of property--especially the publishing office and church buildings. The responsibility of owning everything in his own name prompted White to resign as editor of the *Review* in late 1855. Not being ready yet for legal incorporation, he suggested that a committee own the publishing house and that a financial committee handle the business matters related to the Sabbatarians' growing publishing enterprise.[24] Similar suggestions appeared in regard to the

holding of church property.

A second issue pushing White and others toward a broader church organization concerned the problem of paying preachers. He had first raised the topic in 1849. But talking about the issue without some sort of system to deal with it didn't help much. In fact, as the Sabbatarian work expanded things got worse. Sabbatarian preachers were overworked and underpaid--a sure formula for disaster.

A case in point involved young John Nevins Andrews, a man who later served the church as its leading scholar, its first "official" foreign missionary, and a General Conference president. But in the mid-1850s exhaustion and deprivation had forced him into retiring from the ministry while only in his mid-20s. The fall of 1856 found him becoming a clerk in his uncle's store in Waukon, Iowa. Waukon, in fact, was rapidly becoming a colony of apathetic Sabbatarian Adventists. Another leading minister who fled to Waukon in 1856 was John N. Loughborough, who had become, as he put it, "somewhat discouraged as to finances."[25] The Whites temporarily averted a crisis in the Adventist ministry by making a danger-filled midwinter journey across the ice-clogged Mississippi River to Waukon to wake up the sleeping Adventist community and to reclaim the dropout ministers. But their rededication did not change the objective financial realities.

Anticipating the financial problems, the Battle Creek, Michigan, congregation formed a study group in the spring of 1858 to search the Bible for a plan to support the ministry. Under the leadership of Andrews, the group developed a report accepted in early 1859. The plan of Systematic Benevolence (or "Sister Betsy," as many nicknamed it) encouraged men to contribute 5 go 25 cents per week, and women 2 to 10 cents. In addition, both groups were assessed 1 to 5 cents per week for each $100 unit of property they owned.[26]

James White was jubilant over the plan, believing that it would leave the ministers free from financial embarrassment so that they could work more effectively. His wife was equally

grateful. "I saw," she penned in 1859, "that there should be order in the church of God, and that system is needed in carrying forward successfully the last great message of mercy to the world. God is leading His people in the plan of systematic benevolence."[27]

Of course, it was one thing to have a plan for paying preachers and quite another thing to administrate it in a religious group that had no settled pastors. Proper collection and distribution of the funds logically predicated organizational developments beyond the congregational level.

Closely related to a system for remunerating preachers was a third issue that drove White to a broader form of church organization--the assignment of preachers. In 1859 White wrote that whereas such communities as Battle Creek often had several preachers on hand, others remained "destitute, not having heard a discourse for three months." Recognizing the situation to be a genuine problem, White went on to note that "system in labor, or, in locating preachers' families near their fields of labor, may be called for" as well as financial support. He appealed to the churches to send their requests to him personally.[28]

Thus it appears that by 1859 James White was *acting* the part of superintendent in the assignment and paying of preachers, but without any official structure to undergird his efforts. Such a situation was not only difficult; it also left him open to criticism regarding mismanagement and the misappropriation of funds. He had come to realize that Sabbatarians needed a broader system.

A fourth problem that raised the issue of a more adequate church structure resulted from the question of transferring membership. It was especially difficult when a person had been disfellowshipped by one congregation and desired fellowship with another. How should they handle membership transfers between congregations? And how should independent congregations relate to each other?[29]

By the middle of 1859 White was ready to open the final drive for formal denominational organization. At a conference of believers held in Battle Creek he presented a major paper on

Systematic Benevolence, since "the shortness of time and the vast importance of the truth calls upon us in the most imperative manner to extend missionary labor."[30]

The next month he laid down the gauntlet in no uncertain terms. "*We lack system*," he cried on July 21. "Many of our brethren are in a scattered state. They observe the Sabbath, read with some interest the REVIEW: but beyond this *they are doing but little or nothing for want of some method of united action among them*." To meet the situation, he called for regular meetings in each state (yearly in some and four or five times a year in others) to give guidance to the work of the Sabbatarians in that region.[31]

"We are aware," he wrote, "that these suggestions will not meet the minds of all. Bro. Overcautious will be frightened, and will be ready to warn his brethren to be careful and not venture out too far; while Bro. Confusion will cry out, 'O, this looks just like Babylon! Following the fallen church!' Bro. Do-little will say, 'The cause is the Lord's, and we had better leave it in his hands, he will take care of it.' 'Amen,' says Love-this-world, Slothful, Selfish, and Stingy, 'if God calls men to preach, let them go out and preach, he will take care of them, and those who believe their message;' while Korah, Dathan and Abiram are ready to rebel against those who feel the weight of the cause [e.g., James White] and who watch for souls as those who must give account, and raise the cry, 'You take too much upon you.'"[32]

White let it be known in the most descriptive language that he was sick and tired of the cry of Babylon every time that anyone mentioned organization. "Bro. Confusion," he penned, "makes a most egregious blunder in calling system, which is in harmony with the Bible and good sense, Babylon. *As Babylon signifies confusion, our erring brother has the very word stamped upon his own forehead. And we venture to say that there is not another people under heaven more worthy of the brand of Babylon than those professing the Advent faith who reject Bible order*. Is it not high time that we as a people heartily embrace everything that is good and right in the churches? Is it not blind folly to start back at the idea of system, found everywhere in the

Bible, simply because it is observed in the fallen churches?"[33]

As one who had the "weight of the cause" upon him, James White felt impelled to take his stand for better organization among Sabbatarians. Castigating those who thought that "all that was necessary to run a train of cars was to use the brake well,"[34] he firmly believed that in order to get the Advent movement moving it had to organize. That task he would pursue with full vigor between 1860 and 1863.

Meanwhile, James's strategic place in the Sabbatarian movement had given him a scope of vision that not only separated him from the reasoning processes of many of his fellow believers but had transformed his own thinking. Three points White raised in 1859 are of special importance as we look forward to his organizing activities in the early 1860s.

First, he had moved beyond the biblical literalism of his earlier days when he believed that the Bible must explicitly spell out each aspect of church organization. In 1859 he argued that "we should not be afraid of that system which is not opposed by the Bible, and is approved by sound sense."[35] Thus he had come to a new hermeneutic. *He had moved from a principle of Bible interpretation that held that the only things Scripture allowed were those things it explicitly approved to a hermeneutic that approved of anything that did not contradict the Bible*. That shift was essential to the creative steps in church organization he would advocate in the 1860s.

That revised hermeneutic, however, put White in opposition to those, such as Frisbie and R. F. Cottrell, who maintained a literalistic approach to the Bible that demanded that it explicitly spell something out before the church could accept it. To answer that mentality, White noted that nowhere in the Bible did it say that Christians should have a weekly paper, a steam printing press, build places of worship, or publish books. He went on to argue that the "living church of God" needed to move forward with prayer and common sense.[36]

White's second point involves a redefinition of Babylon. The earliest Adventists had approached the concept in relation to oppression and applied it to the existing denominations.

White reinterpreted it in terms of confusion and applied it to his fellow Sabbatarians. By 1859 his goal had advanced to steering the Advent cause between the twin pitfalls of Babylon as oppressor and Babylon as confusion. White's third point concerned mission. Sabbatarians must organize if they were to fulfill their responsibility to preach the three angels' messages.

Thus between 1856 and 1859 White had shifted from a literalistic perspective to one much more pragmatic. That move had not come easily. But with a sense of responsibility to face the hard facts of life he, unlike some of his colleagues, had been forced to deal pragmatically with the issues in a realistic way. He felt impelled to move on, and would in the next three years take aggressive steps to put Adventism on a firm organizational base in harmony with Bible principles and commensurate with its mission in the world.

The Final Drive for Effective
Organization, 1860-1863

The final drive toward effective organization had three basic steps. The first had to do with the incorporation of church property so that it could be legally held and insured. James White raised the issue in February 1860. He flatly stated that he refused to sign notes making him personally responsible to individuals who desired to lend their money to the publishing house. Thus the movement needed to make arrangements to hold church property in a "proper manner."[37]

White's suggestion called forth a vigorous reaction from R. F. Cottrell--a corresponding editor of the *Review* and the leader of those opposed to church organization. Recognizing that a church could not incorporate unless it had a name, Cottrell wrote that he believed "it would be wrong to 'make us a name,' since that lies at the foundation of Babylon." His suggestion was that Adventists needed to trust in the Lord, who would repay them for any unjust losses at the end of time. "If any man proves a Judas, we can still bear the loss and trust the Lord."[38]

The next issue of the *Review* saw a spirited response from White, who expressed himself

"not a little surprised" at Cottrell's remarks. He pointed out that the publishing office alone had thousands of dollars invested "without one legal owner." "The Devil is not dead," he asserted, and under such circumstances he knew how to shut down the publishing house.

White went on to claim that he regarded "it dangerous to leave with the Lord what he has left with us." We must operate "in a legal manner" if we are to be God's faithful stewards. That is "the only way we can handle real estate in this world."[39] He reiterated that same argument on April 26, pointing out, as he had earlier, that not every Christian duty is explicitly laid out in the Bible. At that point he wrote that "we believe it is safe to be governed by the following RULE. All means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed."[40] With that pronouncement White placed himself fully on the platform of a pragmatic, commonsense approach to all issues not definitely settled in the Bible.

Ellen White agreed with her husband on the topic of church organization. She penned that Cottrell had taken a "wrong stand" and that "his articles were perfectly calculated to have a scattering influence, to lead minds to wrong conclusions." Then she put her influence behind that of her husband's in calling for church order so as "to place the matters of the church in a more secure position, where Satan cannot come in and take advantage."[41]

The pages of the *Review* throughout the summer of 1860 indicate that some of the Sabbatarians were coming more into harmony with James White on the topic of incorporating the publishing house and other aspects of organization. In the meantime, certain individual congregations had begun to organize legally in mid-1860 in order to protect their property.[42]

The property difficulty came to a head at a conference James White called in Battle Creek to discuss the problem along with the related issues of legal incorporation and a formal name, a requirement for incorporation. Between September 29 and October 2, 1860, delegates from at least five states discussed the situation and possible solutions in great detail. All agreed

that whatever they did should be according to the Bible, but as we might expect, they disagreed over the hermeneutical issue of whether something needed to be explicitly mentioned in the Bible. James White, as usual, argued that "every Christian duty is not given in the Scriptures."[43] That essential point had to be recognized before they could make any progress toward legal organization. Gradually, as the various problems and options surfaced, the majority of the candidates accepted White's hermeneutical rule.

The October 1860 conference accomplished three main goals. The first involved the adoption of a constitution for the legal incorporation of the publishing association. The second was that "individual churches so . . . organize as to hold their church property or church buildings legally."[44]

The third goal accomplished at the October 1860 meetings concerned the selection of a denominational name, since the delegates finally agreed that there was no way to escape being viewed as a denomination by those looking at the movement from the outside. Many favored the name "Church of God," but the group did not accept it because several other religious bodies already used it. James White noted that the name adopted should not be objectionable to the world at large. Finally, David Hewitt resolved "that we take the name of Seventh-day Adventists." His motion carried, many delegates recognizing that it was "expressive of our faith and [doctrinal] position."[45]

The 1860 meetings had accomplished much, but much yet remained to be done. The second stage in the final drive toward effective organization had to do with the formation of local conferences in 1861. A special meeting was called to meet at Battle Creek between April 26 and 29 to discuss the issue. That meeting took two important actions. First, it took the final steps to fully legalize the publishing house. Thus the incorporation of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association became official on May 3.

Of equal importance was J. N. Loughborough's call for a "more complete organization of

the church." In response to that plea, the delegates voted that a committee of nine ministers develop a paper on church organization and publish it in the *Review*.[46] That document appeared June 11. Among its recommendations was the formation of state or district conferences to regulate the work of the church in their respective territories.[47]

Reactions to the committee's recommendations were forceful in some sectors of the movement--especially in the East. Many of the eastern leaders apparently believed that White and those in the Midwest had apostatized from the truth in the area of organization.[48]

White, of course, took vigorous exception to the anti-organization faction. Reporting that "the brethren in Pennsylvania voted down organization, and the cause in Ohio has been dreadfully shaken," White summarized his feelings by writing that "*on our eastern tour thus far we seem to be wading through the influence of a stupid uncertainty upon the subject of organization*." As a result, "instead of our being a unified people, growing stronger, we are in many places but little better than broken fragments, still scattering and growing weaker." "*How long shall we wait*?" he inquired of the *Review* readers.[49]

Ellen White was just as agitated on the topic of organization as her husband. She reported a vision on August 3, 1861, in which she was "shown that *some have feared that our churches would become Babylon if they should organize; but those in central New York have been perfect Babylon, confusion*. And now unless the churches are so organized that they can carry out and enforce order, they have nothing to hope for in the future; they must scatter into fragments."[50]

The time for action had arrived. Accordingly, a general meeting convened in Battle Creek from October 4 through 6, 1861, to form the first state conference. The October 1861 meeting is one of the pivotal events in Seventh-day Adventist history. The first item of business was "the proper manner of organizing churches." As a part of that item, James White recommended that the members of each congregation formally organize by signing a church covenant. "We, the undersigned," went his proposed covenant, "hereby associate ourselves together, as a church,

taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ."[51]

The idea of signing a covenant stimulated a lengthy discussion. Moses Hull saw no problem in the idea since "we pledge ourselves only to do one thing, to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." "There can be," he added, "nothing more in Christianity. . . . No one can call this a creed or articles of faith."[52]

Loughborough then took the lead in discussing the dangers of a formal creed.

- "The first step of apostasy," he noted, "is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe.
- "The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship.
- "The third is to try members by that creed.
- "The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed.
- "And, fifth, to commence persecution against such."[53]

James White also weighed into the discussion. "Making a creed," he wrote, "is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement." Those churches that had set up creeds "have marked out a course for the Almighty. They say virtually that the Lord must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed. . . . The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed. We are not taking one step, in what we are doing, toward becoming Babylon" [as oppression].[54]

The central item of business in the October 1861 meeting was the recommendation "to the churches in the State of Michigan to unite in one Conference, with the name of The Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." The delegates adopted the recommendation along with a simple structure consisting of a conference president, a conference clerk, and a conference

committee of three.[55]

With the first state conference a reality, others quickly appeared in 1862; Southern Iowa (March 16), Northern Iowa (May 10), Vermont (June 15), Illinois (September 28), Wisconsin (September 28), Minnesota (October 4), and New York (October 25). But not all would follow Michigan's lead. An examination of the above list indicates that New England (with the exception of Vermont) was not represented. Some of the regions in that area would not form a local conference until 1870.

By 1862, however, the movement toward organization was rolling at full speed. That brings us to the third stage of the final drive.

While it is true that state conferences were in the process of being formed, the emerging denomination had no way to coordinate their work or the assignment of ministers to different fields. J. H. Waggoner raised that issue to consciousness in a forceful manner in June 1862. "I do not believe," he wrote, "that we shall ever fully realize the benefits of organization till this matter" of a general conference "is acted upon." He concluded his article by recommending that "every conference of Seventh-day Adventists send a delegate or delegates to the General Conference; and that a General Conference Committee be appointed, with whom the State conferences may correspond, and through whom they shall present their requests for laborers."[56]

Several readers of the *Review* responded to Waggoner's proposition with hearty affirmations in the summer of 1862. Without a general conference that shall represent the whole body of believers, J. N. Andrews argued, "we shall be thrown into confusion every time that concert of action is especially necessary. The work of organization, wherever it has been entered into in a proper manner, has borne good fruit; and hence I desire to see it completed in such a manner as shall secure its full benefit, not only to each church, but to the whole body of brethren and to the cause of truth."[57]

In October 1862 the Michigan Conference session not only set up operating procedures,

but extended an invitation for "the several State Conferences to meet" with them "in general conference" at their 1863 annual meeting.[58] At James White's insistence the session was moved up from October 1863 to May of that year. He believed it was imperative that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists form as soon as possible. Announcing the meeting in late April, White billed it as *the most important meeting ever held by the Seventh-day Adventists*." As he saw it, *the proposed General Conference must be "the great regulator" of the state conferences if they were to secure "united, systematic action in the entire body" of believers.* The duty of the General Conference would be "to mark out the general course to be pursued by State Conferences." And if, White noted, "it be the pleasure of State Conferences to carry out the decisions of General Conference, unity thus far will be secured."[59]

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists organized at a meeting called for that purpose in Battle Creek from May 20 to May 23, 1863. The enabling action read: "For the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth, and of perfecting the organization of the Seventh-day Adventists, we, the delegates from the several State Conferences, hereby proceed to organize a General Conference, and adopt the following constitution for the government thereof."[60]

The delegates unanimously elected James White president but he declined the invitation because some would interpret his forceful campaign for the establishment of a complete organization as a calculated grab for personal power. After some discussion, the session chose John Byington in White's place.[61]

Perspective

The battle for organization had been long and difficult, but by 1863 it was over. With a functional organization the denomination was ready to move forward. Looking back at the development of organization, three things stand out.

The first key element that allowed the antiorganizational people to organize was a transformation of their understanding of Babylon, which in the 1850s morphed from an idea associated with persecution to one highlighting confusion. James White repeatedly pointed out that without organization their confused state did not permit them to move forward. When others finally accepted the new connotation of Babylon they were willing to organize, but only reluctantly. Their discussion of creedalism and its effects indicate their ongoing fear that Babylon as oppression could resurrect.

The second crucial understanding that allowed the Sabbatarians to organize was a transformed hermeneutic that had moved from one in which the only things permissible were those explicitly spelled out in the Bible to a hermeneutic that asserted that all things were lawful except those forbidden by the Bible and did not violate common sense. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of that transformation. Without it Adventism would have been a minor footnote to the history of New England and the American Midwest. But through it White provided the means by which he and his wife could guide the young movement into a mission to the entire world.

The third important understanding is that the move toward organization was fueled by a growing concept of mission. In fact, it was the pragmatic necessities of mission that undergirded every step in the organizational process and also the transformations of the budding movement's understanding of both Babylon and hermeneutics.

At bottom, mission to the world was the *only* reason for organization. And by the 1890s that mission had reached around the world. That very success would call for adjustments in 1901 so that the church could even be more effective in its worldwide outreach. And if the denomination is to remain effective in the twenty-first century the logic of the 1860s and 1901 will have to continue to function in a rapidly growing, multiethnic church committed to the mission of taking the message of the three angels "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and

people" (Rev. 14:6).

<div align="center">Notes</div>

1. For more on the early development of Adventist organization, see Andrew G. Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844-1881* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987); for a general overview of the development of Adventist organization, see George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006).

2. Joshua V. Himes, "Christian Connexion," in T. Newton Brown, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Brattleboro, VT: Fessenden and Co., 1836), p. 362; italics supplied.

3. *Ibid*., p. 363.

4. Charles Fitch, "'*Come Out of Her My People*,'" (Rochester, NY: E. Shephard, 1843), pp. 9, 19, 24.

5. George Storrs, "Come Out of Her My People," *Midnight Cry*, Feb. 15, 1844, pp. 237, 238.

6. *Ibid*., p. 238.

7. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), pp. 43-53.

8. James White to Bro. Bowles, Nov. 8, 1849.

9. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1860), vol. 2, pp. 93, 97-99.

10. E. G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 125.

11. James White to Bro. and Sis. Collins, Sept 8, 1849; James White to My Dear Afflicted Brother, Mar. 18, 1850; Ellen G. White, "Vision at Paris Maine," MS 11, Dec. 25, 1850.

12. James White to Brethren in Christ, Nov. 11, 1851; [James White], "Our Tour East," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1851, p. 52. See also, Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), pp. 216-226.

13. "F. M. Shimper to Bro. White," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 19, 1851, p. 15. See also, George R. Knight, "Early Seventh-day Adventists and Ordination, 1844-1863," in Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), p. 106.

14. J. N. Loughborough, *The Church*: *Its Organization, Order and Discipline* ([Washington, DC]: Review and Herald, [1906]), p. 101.

15. [James White], "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 6, 1853, p. 173; italics supplied.

16. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), pp. 97, 99, 101; italics supplied.

17. [James White], "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, Mar. 28, 1854, p. 76.

18. Joseph Bates, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 29, 1854, pp. 22, 23.

19. [James White], "Gospel Order*," Review and Herald*, Mar. 28, 1854, p. 76.

20. [James White], "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 23, 1855, p. 164.

21. J. B. Frisbie, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 26, 1854, p. 147.

22. J. B. Frisbie, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 9, 1855, p. 155.

23. Joseph Bates, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 29, 1854, p. 22; italics

supplied.

24. Uriah Smith, "To the Friends of the Review," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 4, 1855, p. 76; James White to Brother Dodge, Aug. 20, 1855.

25. J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek MI: General Conf. Association of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1892), p. 208.

26. For an overview of the Systematic Benevolence plan see Brian Strayer, "'Sister Betsy' and Systematic Giving among Adventists," *Adventist Review*, Dec. 6, 1984, pp. 8-10.

27. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 1, p. 191; italics supplied.

28. James White, "A Complaint," *Review and Herald*, June 16, 1859, p. 28.

29. A. S. Hutchins, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Sept. 18, 1856, p. 158; J. B. Frisbie, "Church Order," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 23, 1856, p. 198.

30. James White, "Conference Address," *Review and Herald*, June 9, 1859, pp. 21-23; Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings," *ibid*., pp. 20, 21.

31. James White, "Yearly Meetings," *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1859, p. 68; italics supplied.

32. *Ibid*.

33. *Ibid*.; italics supplied.

34. *Ibid*..

35. *Ibid*.

36. *Ibid*.

37. James White, "Borrowed Money," *Review and Herald*, Feb. 23, 1860, p. 108.

38. R. F. Cottrell, "Making Us a Name," *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1860, pp. 140, 141.

39. James White, "'Making Us a Name,'" *Review and Herald*, March 29, 1860, p. 152.

40. James White, "'Making Us a Name,'" *Review and Herald*, April 26, 1860, pp. 180-182.

41. E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 211.

42. Godfrey T. Anderson, "Make Us a Name," *Adventist Heritage*, July 1974, p. 30.

43. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of B. C. Conference," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 16, 1860, p. 169.

44. *Ibid*., pp. 170, 171.

45. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of B. C. Conference," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 23, 1860, p. 179.

46. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of B. C. Conference," *Review and Herald*, Apr. 30, 1861, p. 189.

47. J. H. Waggoner et al, "Conference Address," *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1861, p. 21.

48. [James White], "Eastern Tour," *Review and Herald*, Sept. 3, 1861, p. 108.

49. [James White], "Organization," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 27, 1861, p. 100; italics supplied.

50. E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 270-272; italics supplied.

51. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861, p. 148.

52. *Ibid*.

53. *Ibid*.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. J. H. Waggoner, "General Conferences," *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1862, p. 29.

57. J. N. Andrews, "General Conferences," *Review and Herald*, July 15, 1862, p. 52.

58. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Michigan State Conference," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 14, 1862, p. 157.

59. [James White], "General Conference," *Review and Herald*, Apr. 28, 1863, p. 172; italics supplied.

60. John Byington and Uriah Smith, "Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1863, pp. 204-206.

61. *Ibid.*